

THE NEGRO AS REFLECTED IN SOME  
WRITINGS OF RALPH MCGILL

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

The race issue, for a long time a major problem in America, has affected all aspects of American life. It still is one of the major problems in the United States, for many minority groups in this country have been denied the opportunity to enter into the mainstream of the American culture. No one group, however, has had experiences equal to those of the American Negro. No other group has been so rigidly denied the normal access to life's choices and to the normal processes of absorption as has been the Negro. The status of the Negro was "not one of disguised caste but almost nakedly of a pariah caste, kept in subjection by law, social custom, terrorism, and fear...." The problem is national in scope, but the situation is at its worst in the South where the general low regard for the Negro is less subtly expressed, and where the group is openly subjected to a caste system deliberately designed to bring about perpetual separation with the Negro placed in continual subordination.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Max Lerner, America As A Civilization (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1957), pp. 512-519.

In recent years this system, with all its inherent inequities, has come more and more under national and world focus and criticism. This is due to many factors, several of which will be mentioned here. Foremost among these forces is the fact that the Negro himself has challenged the system that has inhibited every aspect of his daily life, exploited him, and conveyed to him the connotations of inferiority by setting him apart from the rest of the American society, and withholding from him the status of full citizenship. Moreover, changes in the social, economic, and political order, national and international, have caused greater scrutiny and criticism of the contradictions between America's principles and its practices with respect to equality of opportunity for all its citizens.<sup>1</sup> Finally, there was that group of white southerners who have been courageously outspoken in their fight for Negro rights. With an exceptional sense of duty, these men have identified themselves with recognition and acceptance of realities and a positive and moral approach to the problem of race. These people from various fields of endeavor have sought more and more to arouse in the general American public a sense of its moral responsibilities. Included among these unusual southerners were such men as W. J. Cash, C. Van Woodward, James M. Dabbs, Hodding Carter, Harry S. Ashmore, and Ralph E.

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<sup>1</sup>James M. Dabbs, The Southern Heritage (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1958), pp. 19-54.

McGill. Perhaps the most courageously consistent, and dedicated among these has been Ralph E. McGill, publisher of the Atlanta Constitution, who fought openly and fearlessly against extremism and bigotry. He has exhibited courage in editorials, books, articles, and television appearances as he spoke out for Negro rights. He has become famous for his liberal views, his honest convictions, and a sense of fair play.

The writer was born in a southern community and is well aware of inequities embodied in the customs and traditions peculiar to the region. Being cognizant of the role that public opinion can play in the maintenance of or the breaking down of racial prejudices and discrimination, and of the power of the press to influence the public and to help shape patterns of behavior, the writer has chosen as the subject of this paper "The Negro As Reflected In Some Writings of Ralph McGill."

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attitude of Ralph McGill toward the Negro, in an effort to ascertain what role, if any, he played in sustaining or in undermining certain southern customs and traditional practices that tended to relegate the Negro to an inferior status. This is not an attempt to present a categorical or unqualified critique of Mr. McGill's philosophy, but rather it is an investigative study to try to ascertain his position. It is also a study of any changes in his attitude and the direction of any such changes in order to obtain a reasonably valid

interpretation of Mr. McGill's position on Negro rights.

The majority of the materials used in this paper were taken from expressions by McGill, oral and written. These include numerous articles that he contributed to various national periodicals, editorials in the Atlanta Constitution, his front page column in the Constitution, books that he has written, and television appearances. The writer also used sources containing material written about McGill. Other references were used as a means of placing Mr. McGill's views in the general context of the periods in which those views were expressed. Other references were also used to gain a logical conception of general attitudes on the racial problems held in common by other outstanding Americans, especially those of other outstanding southern whites.

The writer chose McGill as the object of this study because of his apparently great knowledge and understanding of human affairs at all levels, his remarkable ability to combine sympathy and regionalism with reason and boldness of expression, his capacity for speaking serenely and without rancor in spite of overwhelming criticisms and intimidations, and his great power to influence and persuasively mold public opinion. Moreover, in recent years he has exhibited immense courage as he led an almost perpetual crusade in the area of civil rights for Negroes, using his journalistic talent as a powerful organ to replace myth and ignorance with truth and enlightenment.

Ralph Emerson McGill was born February 5, 1898, in Soddy, Tennessee. He attended public school in Chattanooga, and was graduated from Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, in 1922. He began his journalistic career with the Nashville Banner as a political reporter, moving to the Atlanta Constitution in 1929 as a sports editor.<sup>1</sup> He became the associate editor in 1938 and, in 1941, he was named executive editor. In 1960 he succeeded Clark Howell as publisher, the position he now holds.<sup>2</sup>

McGill showed a strong interest in politics and public issues at an early age. At thirteen, he was a ward heeler in Chattanooga, Tennessee. When he came to Atlanta, he soon got into politics, fighting editorially as a leader and a spokesman against crooked politicians and supporting those whom he thought would provide the best government. He has spoken out on many incendiary issues, and led a newspaper campaign that stopped Klan demonstrations intended to frighten Negroes away from the polls.<sup>3</sup> He led and helped to win the fight to get legislative action unmasking the Klan in Georgia.<sup>4</sup>

Jack Tarver, president of Atlanta Newspaper, Inc.,

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<sup>1</sup>The Saturday Evening Post, May 22, 1948, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, May 5, 1960, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>The Saturday Evening Post, May 22, 1948, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup>"The Constitution Wins," Time, February 12, 1951, p. 46.

has given McGill free rein in leading the Journal and Constitution on touchy issues. "I feel that Ralph is right," said Tarver, "and that we are fortunate in having him lead the way he has." His leadership has enabled the newspaper to render as great a service as they could.<sup>1</sup>

Noted for his ability to portray life honestly, and for his long and brilliant record of consistent, sincere and courageous journalistic policy, McGill has received many citations, including the Pulitzer Prize for outstanding editorial writing in 1958, and an honorary doctorate from Harvard in 1961, the citation of which read, "In a troubled time his steady voice of reason champions a new South." He has been abusively criticized also, for championing the cause of the Negro. His syndicated column is widely-read and has won for McGill respect as well as rabid hatred. Speaking of McGill, William B. Hartsfield, former mayor of Atlanta, said, "He's been very consistent, very fearless, like a beacon light pounded by wind and wave, and he's shone steadily through years and years."<sup>2</sup>

It has been necessary to devote the greater portion of this study to McGill's reactions to conditions and issues in the South, or those that greatly influenced the South. There are several reasons for this. Great portions of the Negro

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<sup>1</sup>Boston Sunday Globe, June 18, 1961, p. A-7.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. A-6.

population are concentrated in the South, an area where the segregation issue has been hottest, and where its practices are a little less subtle than in other regions. Moreover, McGill is a southerner who has profound sympathy for his region and its traditions. His reactions to racial issues in his own region provided the writer a greater opportunity to analyze McGill's attitudes in the terms of the time and circumstances involved. Emphasis has been placed on such aspects as voting rights, economic opportunities, and social, educational, and general rights, respectively.

Although no strict time limit has been placed on this study, most of the material covers the period starting with McGill's early years with the Constitution as a sports writer and extending through 1964. The necessity for longer period of time was due to the fact that McGill possesses such a wide range of interests that a long-range study of his writings concerning the Negro was needed to ascertain any degree of consistency. Secondly, the writer felt that the impact of social changes, and national and world developments on the personal views of McGill could best be studied from this long-range standpoint. Finally, only in the last one and a half decades did many of the more volatile racial issues create great pressures. This, too, was the time when apparently McGill began to gain a better understanding of the racial problem, and a broader and more liberal view point on how to solve it.

## Chapter II

### McGill's Attitude on the Political Status of the Negro

The political status of the Negro has been one of the more degrading aspects of American life. Until recently, the Negro has been virtually disfranchised, especially in the South where constitutional restrictions, supplemented by the white primary and other extralegal devices, had successfully deprived the Negro of his political freedom.<sup>1</sup> By propagating a doctrine defining the status of the Negro, a small minority in the areas containing heavy Negro populations impressed on the entire region a philosophy favorable to the needs of the region. The philosophy was supported and maintained by exploiting the fear of danger implicit in the Negro vote to white supremacy.<sup>2</sup>

The process began immediately following the Civil War. During that period, a few authoritative white southerners advised the voluntary granting of suffrage to all Negroes who were literate or who owned property. The uncompromising

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph McGill, "If the Southern Negro Got the Vote," New York Times Magazine, June 21, 1959, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>V. O. Key, Jr., Southern Politics in State and Nation, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), p. 9.



core of the South, branded their advice as heresy and set about to affect permanent disfranchisement.<sup>1</sup> The refusal by the states to move toward preparing the Negro for citizenship played "into the hands of the much vilified Back Republicanism," thus the Fourteenth Amendment was passed. It was admittedly a coercive measure of the radical reconstruction. When the measure became a part of the Constitution the masses of recently freed Negroes, having little or no preparation for liberty, and having been denied the necessary assistance to make the transition from slavery to freedom, were not ready for citizenship. This was a great opportunity, intimated McGill, for the South to make a start toward preparing the Negro for the right of franchise. Instead the reconstructed states began to initiate the infamous Black Codes and various fraudulent and ingenious devices, written into the constitutions of the Deep South states, and all designed to exclude the Negro vote.<sup>2</sup> The Fifteenth Amendment, which was adopted in 1870, was designed by the radical Republicans to grant suffrage to the newly emancipated Negroes. On the surface it forbade the interference with voting rights because of race, color or creed. Although the Fifteenth Amendment provided for the protection

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<sup>1</sup>Hodding Carter, The Angry Scar: The Story of Reconstruction (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1959), pp. 46-47.

<sup>2</sup>Ralph McGill, The South and the Southerner (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963), pp. 218-219.

of suffrage rights of Negroes, the struggle for the implementation of these rights has been a long and arduous one. There is evidence that the Southern States have systematically disfranchised the Negro and have used an indeterminable succession of devices, some of them violent, designed to circumvent the Fifteenth Amendment.<sup>1</sup> The long, endless succession of schemes that followed, mainly produced by Mississippi, South Carolina, and Louisiana, included the poll tax laws, literacy tests, the "grandfather clause" and the white primary, the most effective of them all. The discriminatory enforcement of the laws rendered the Negro politically impotent.<sup>2</sup>

The various codes and schemes not only disfranchised the Negro, but also potentially supported the establishment of a system of peonage that was actually another variation of pre-Civil War slavery.<sup>3</sup> In perfect opposition to the constitutional mandates of the Fifteenth Amendment, forbidding the denial of suffrage "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude," was the southern caste principle that no Negro be allowed to vote.<sup>4</sup> The reaction

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<sup>1</sup>Robert K. Carr, Marver H. Bernstein, and Donald H. Morrison, American Democracy in Theory and Practice (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1961), p. 161.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, February 3, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Alfred H. Kelly and Winfred A. Harbison, The American Constitution: Its Origins and Development (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1955), p. 457.

<sup>4</sup>Arnold Rose, The Negro In America (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1948), p. 157.

and reunion in terms of the Hayes "sellout" in 1877 virtually sealed the doom for Negro voting for some time.<sup>1</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century the Negro had been virtually totally disfranchised. The foundation for disfranchising the Negro was laid and the principle of white supremacy became sacred, having as its base the assumption that the Negro was inferior. Its credo, in essence was, that only Southerners understood the Negro; that political equality meant social equality and must not be permitted. Thus white supremacy became the clarion call for southern unity. The constant expounding of the virtues of white supremacy by politicians so incited the passions of the white masses that as time passed, even the most callous injustices ceased to be regarded as evil, but rather they became "hallowed traditions and customs," necessary to protect and preserve the "southern way of life." The rigid formula of the southern way of life was set forth and promoted as the rock upon which white supremacy rested.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to disfranchisement by the Deep South states, other factors were instrumental in helping to establish and to support the maintenance of the disfranchisement of the Negro. There was the combination of the Democratic Party, and Northern industrialists and promoters

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, "The South Looks Ahead," Ebony, September, 1963, p. 100.

<sup>2</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 202, 218-219.

who had "redeemed" the South from military and carpetbag government. In doing so they had established a caste system which relegated the Negro to a rank of subordination and, as fast as Southern state legislatures could act, deprived him of civil rights and equal protection of the law. "By the end of the nineteenth century the caste status" was written into the segregation laws. For the Negro, "disfranchisement, while not literally total, was virtually so."<sup>1</sup>

Some believed that Booker T. Washington was also instrumental in establishing the new caste system. Commenting on a speech given by Washington in 1895 at the Atlanta Industrial Exposition, C. Van Woodward declared that the speech had a profound effect upon the fight for equality by Negroes. Washington, he declared, had announced "to the Southern white man...a doctrine of profound significance for the future of racial relations...." The pronouncement, constituting "a renunciation of active political aspirations for the Negro," had "an important bearing upon the movement for disfranchisement."<sup>2</sup>

The history of disfranchisement of the Negro was also deeply influenced by what McGill called the "twig benders." Although there were many, there were four whom McGill considered most skillful at the art of vulgar invective and

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, The South and The Southerner, pp. 201-202.

<sup>2</sup>C. Van Woodward, Origins of the New South, 1877-1913. (Louisiana State University Press, 1951), p. 323.

demagoguery. Their "ideas, blasphemies, prejudices, sophistries, syllogisms, phrases of invective, and theories have been, and yet are," being repeated. The first of the four was Professor Thomas R. Dew, of Virginia, whose preamble was that the great civilization flourished only where there was slavery, and that the Negro, unfitted for freedom by nature, was given protection, care, and security by slavery. It had God's approval, and it made true democracy possible by bringing all whites to one common level.<sup>1</sup>

The three other benders of twigs, described by McGill were Benjamin Ryan Tillman of South Carolina who considered the Negro to be, not a man, but a savage and animal that was possibly the missing link, a beast not fit for citizenship or education; James K. Vardaman, a vulgar, though eloquently persuasive lawyer and newspaper editor from Mississippi, who saw the Negro as a danger to white civilization, if he were educated; and finally, Tom Watson of Georgia, who at first encouraged the Negro to become a full citizen, but who later changed to become one of the most vicious racist demagogues of the four. The prejudices, irrelevances, invectives and distortions of Dew, Tillman, Vardaman and Watson still work to withhold political rights from Negroes.<sup>2</sup>

The Supreme Court also played an influential role in

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, The South and The Southerner, pp. 112-120.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

"the maintenance of the caste system in the South by nullifying many of the gains made by the Negro, and in 1898, it upheld the constitutional disfranchisement of the Negro by the state of Mississippi. Thus mass disfranchisement of Negroes was encouraged by legal sanction of the Court.<sup>1</sup>

For all practical purposes, the Negro was almost politically inactive until well into the twentieth century. If one method failed to stand the test in the courts, another was devised to replace it. The Southern legislators, for instance, adopted a device, the grandfather clause, that would disqualify illiterate Negroes, and at the same time, provide the necessary relief for white illiterates. The whites merely had to show that they were descendants of citizens who were qualified voters before 1867, or had served in any of the American wars since the American Revolution, in order to vote and thus bypass the difficult literacy tests. The underschooled Negroes were vulnerable and highly susceptible to failure under the difficult tests. Under these circumstances, the literacy tests proved to be a very effective deterrent to Negro voting. By the early thirties, the Negro population of the rural South was still large, voteless, and without voice in decisions about government, schools, or policies which controlled his life. He served on no juries, and for justice, he depended on the whim or friendship of some white

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<sup>1</sup>Carter, The Angry Scar, p. 384.

man. As late as 1945, "voting rights were still being crudely, often viciously, denied in rural areas."<sup>1</sup>

McGill's views on voting rights for Negroes were considerably different from those held by the average white Southerner. It was his contention that the qualified voter should have the right to participate in the choice of the officials who will govern him. McGill held that "the fight for civil rights should be concentrated" on that phase of the problem which involves voting. The right of suffrage is the basic right, he continued. "All others are a part of its mosaic structure."<sup>2</sup> He cited the murder of Charles Mack Parker, a Negro accused of rape, in Poplarville, Mississippi, April 25, 1959, as the result of denial of voting rights and the consequent denial of jury duty to Negroes. Such denial is not found only in isolated places like Poplarville, nor was its limited simply to the inability to participate in the choice of candidates for office. It is the basic right, which, "once obtained," would serve as the best "remedy for all civil grievances," and to obtain rights now denied. He believed that it was "likely that the systematic denial of voting rights to Negroes was one of the motivating factors in the hate-heated heads of the murderers."<sup>3</sup> Thoughtful

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<sup>1</sup> McGill, The South and the Southerner, passim.

<sup>2</sup> McGill, "Civil Rights for Negroes," Atlantic Monthly, November, 1949, pp. 64-66.

<sup>3</sup> New York Times Magazine, June 21, 1959, p. 5.

Southerners would welcome the qualified Negro voter to the polls. The extension of such right would surely bring to an end the endemic conditions in the South, which for so long a time had been a shameful part of the Southern scene.<sup>1</sup>

With the "grandfather clause" having been invalidated in 1915, the white primary remained as the most effective means of disfranchising the Negro until 1944. By this device, Negroes were excluded from participating in the electoral or organizational processes of the Democratic Party. Such exclusion in the one-party South rendered the political activity of the Negro impotent. Before 1944, the white primary had come to constitute the major legal device upon which Negro disfranchisement rested. In the case of Smith v. Allwright, 1944, the U. S. Supreme Court declared the white primary unconstitutional.<sup>2</sup>

The extreme white supremacy advocates were not inclined to accept the decision with complacency. The white primary had been more desirable even than the literacy test, for it drew the color line more sharply and cleanly, and could exclude all Negro participation in political affairs, given the one-party system. The immediate effect of the decision on Negro voting was slight, for in many instances, litigations

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, April 3, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Emerson and David Haber, Political and Civil Rights in the United States (Buffalo: Dennis and Company, Inc., 1952), p. 288.



were necessary to impel local authorities to comply with the decision. Many hoped for some method or contrivance by which to preserve in effect, if not in form, the white primary.<sup>1</sup>

McGill, too, believed that the white primary had been the "real anti-Negro barrier, withholding from him the full status of citizenship." Simply outlawing the white primary had been enough to correct the inequities in voting rights. The administration of voting laws was still left to the same officials who had been there before the ruling was handed down, but who were now operating under "various camouflaged imitations of the white primary."<sup>2</sup> The court decision had spawned numerous counterparts of the device. These were result of hurried and frenzied efforts by the angry, resentful states to invent some scheme that would invalidate the decision and, at the same time, stand the tests of the courts. One such device molded by the legal minds of the South was the various literacy laws containing the "understanding clause," and with the registrars as the sole judges. Whenever this method failed, the Southern whites readily used the techniques of intimidation, physical and mental pressures to discourage aspiring Negro voters. The Negro would have to turn to the courts to remedy the situation, but the legal battles would be long and time-consuming. In the meantime,

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<sup>1</sup>Key, op.cit., p. 625.

<sup>2</sup>Atlantic Monthly, November, 1949, pp. 64-66.

numerous Negroes would remain victims of the deficiencies of the system.<sup>1</sup>

Incidental to the opinion held by McGill concerning the continued use of the principle of the white primary was an occurrence during the 1944 Democratic primary in Georgia shortly after the Supreme Court had ruled the white primary unconstitutional. Atlanta Negroes attempting to vote in the primary were turned away for various reasons. Several Negroes of the city were refused the ballot because the registrar allegedly could not find their names on the voting list. As they left the polling place, local policemen standing outside, remarked, "We don't have no trouble with 'niggers' out here." An Atlanta attorney, A. T. Walden, had attempted to vote in his own precinct where he voted regularly in general election, but it was closed for the Democratic primary. He appeared at another precinct and, after giving his name and address, was told that no one was "listed for voting at that address." When Walden insisted on voting, he was then told by an election official that the primary was for white voters only. Despite the fact that the white primary had been declared illegal; and, that over five thousand Negroes in Fulton County had paid poll taxes; and had registered to vote, they unequivocally were being

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<sup>1</sup>New York Times Magazine, June 21, 1959, p. 5.

made the victims of the outlawed primary.<sup>1</sup>

The incident served to substantiate the belief held by McGill that the ruling had little effects on Negro voting. He believed that most states would wait to be forced to obey the decision through court challenges. He favored the use of the coercive power of the Justice Department to eliminate some of the discriminatory practices in the administration of voting laws. In connection with this idea, McGill recommended that the Justice Department throw its "full weight, advice, and assistance into the measure so that all the various camouflaged imitations of the white primary" could be "quickly brought into Federal courts and found to be against the letter and spirit of the constitution of the United States." The procedure, continued McGill, would win the victory for civil rights much earlier than the slow, tedious procedure of congressional legislation. In 1949 McGill stated that if the various imitations of the white primary system were ruled out in time there could be four million Negroes voting in the former Confederate states by 1952.<sup>2</sup>

The poll tax, another restrictive device, was still retained in five states as a prerequisite to voting, even late in 1962. The effectiveness of the tax was derived from and enhanced by its complex structure-accumulative and

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<sup>1</sup>Time, July 17, 1944, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup>Atlantic Monthly, November 1949, pp. 64-66.

noncompulsory as a tax. By setting payment before February 1st, nine months before election, would discourage payment by the slothful, provide time for loss of receipt by the careless, "and make less likely payment of poll taxes by candidates and other interested parties for the voters." This, the most renowned of the direct impediments to free suffrage, was still being used in Alabama, Mississippi, Texas and Virginia in 1962.<sup>1</sup>

In theory, the poll tax disfranchised as many whites as Negroes. Its restrictive effectiveness as a deterrent to Negro voting, however, was obtained through the discriminatory administration of the poll tax laws in the various states.<sup>2</sup> In 1962, a proposed Twenty-fourth Amendment to the Constitution to outlaw the poll tax in national elections was passed by Congress. It is now pending approval by three-fourths of the state legislatures (38 states) in seven years.<sup>3</sup>

At one time Mr. McGill did not consider the poll tax to be a major restriction on Negro voting rights. He held that the poll tax as a prerequisite for voting was never a real barrier limited to the Negro because it kept just as many white away as Negro.<sup>4</sup> He also opposed the efforts of

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<sup>1</sup>Birmingham News, September 25, 1962, p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Jack Greenberg, Race Relations and American Law. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), p. 145.

<sup>3</sup>Birmingham News, September 25, 1962, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup>Atlantic Monthly, November, 1949, pp. 64-66.

Governor Ellis Arnall, 1943-1947, and his administration in their fight to repeal the poll tax in Georgia. He said, "It is entirely legal," "we have a perfect legal right to it...."<sup>1</sup> It was his feeling at this time that the fight for the abolition of the tax was political in nature and that the Negro question was being stirred up where it did not exist. The issue was being used by professional agitators and politicians for the publicity that it afforded. He insisted that abolition of the poll tax would bring about no great reform in government, nor would it prove to be a panacea to Negro voting ills. Abolition if effected, should be based on the simple fact that it would allow more people to vote and would give a chance for better government.<sup>2</sup> The tax was wrong only because it prevented a freer expression of the will of the people.<sup>3</sup>

The contradiction in the statements above provided little basis from which to draw a positive conclusion on McGill's attitude on the poll tax at that time. However, three years later, McGill wrote that he had long opposed the poll tax and was hopeful that he had contributed in some small way "to its demise in Georgia."<sup>4</sup> In more recent

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, January 4, 1945, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., December 21, 1944, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., January 4, 1945, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., February 29, 1948.

years his expressions on the issue have indicated considerable change in his attitude toward the constitutionality of the tax and toward its restrictive power on Negro voting rights. In his column of March 28, 1963, he held that the poll tax, was a limitation upon the right of franchise; moreover, there was little justification for its use. Forty-five states, he continued, flourished very well politically without it. There was nothing to indicate that the politics in the five states that still retained the tax was any purer than that in the other forty-five; or that the government was superior to those in states without it. "The best representative government," he continued, "is one in which all qualified citizens may vote without limitations designed to produce a small vote." No state, asserted McGill, had the right to deny the constitutional right of all citizens to equal treatment at the ballot box. He recognized however, that the abolition of the poll tax would not of itself increase the number of Negro voters. The real and almost insurmountable barrier was the literacy test.<sup>1</sup>

An example of the problem at point is the Alabama Boswell Amendment which required good character and the comprehension of the duties and obligations of good citizenship; that applicants understand and explain the Constitution. The Board of Registrars had the arbitrary power to determine

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, March 28, 1963, p. 1.

if the above requirements had been satisfactorily complied with.<sup>1</sup> In 1949, the Federal district court ruled that the Boswell Amendment violated the Fifteenth Amendment. This ruling was later sustained by the United States Supreme Court in the case of Schnell v. Davis (1949). The courts refused to overlook the obvious intent of the Boswell Amendment.<sup>2</sup>

McGill felt that Alabama's literacy law was but a variation of a southwide pattern which effectively disfranchised the Negro in the administration of the law. In all states the registrars possessed "powers of discretion, actual or assumed," which they used in the most arbitrary fashion to disfranchise Negroes and pass illiterate whites. Other discriminatory practices used by Alabama's registrars were: the use of different, arbitrary questions and forms in the various counties; there were frequent unannounced changes in hours of registration; intimidation physical, psychological, economic. Negroes were subjugated by inequities that were sanctioned by the same laws that were supposed to protect him.<sup>3</sup>

The United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1961, confirmed the above practices. The report took cognizance

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<sup>1</sup>Key, op.cit., pp. 632-633.

<sup>2</sup>Robert Eugene Cushman, Leading Constitution Decisions. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, Inc., 1960), pp. 106-107.

<sup>3</sup>New York Times Magazine, June 21, 1959, p. 22.

of other practices that denied Negroes the right to vote such as the attempt to change municipal boundary lines on racial grounds and amending the state constitution in such manner as to drop Negroes from registration lists. The report found several counties in Mississippi where no Negroes were registered even though Negroes comprised more than 50% of the population; that Negroes who tried to register were dropped from the program of free Federal surplus food allotments; others who tried were fined, placed in jail, had police dogs set upon them.<sup>1</sup> The Commission's biracial advisory committee in Mississippi issued a statement calling: "The existing conditions under which our Negro citizens must live are in the main intolerable."<sup>2</sup>

The fierce blindness with which the South continued to deny suffrage to Negroes was due in part, thought McGill, to rigid indoctrination of Southernism. From a very early age Southerners have been taught that they were Southerners first and Americans second. "They have been conditioned," said McGill, "to react as almost compulsive regionalists, or even more narrowly as state righters in opposition to the Union, its courts and the Constitution." Consequently they compulsively "defend even that which is unworthy nearly because it is Southern."<sup>3</sup> What Southerners call "historic

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<sup>1</sup>Newsweek, April 8, 1963, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., April 29, 1963, p. 25.

<sup>3</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, p. 256.



states' rights" really means "race discrimination and the local right to practice it." This was implicit in the vast anger in Mississippi over granting Negroes voting rights, and in the callous disfranchisement of over four hundred Negro voters in Tuskegee by the State of Alabama.<sup>1</sup>

But the South is moving forward, asserted McGill. An old way of life was passing in spite of the fact that the old citadels of hate and extremism and the harsh, callous, insensitive consciences still exist. That the tragedy, southern style--the denial of voting rights to Negroes in Alabama and Mississippi--must or will continue for a while is unfortunate.

He admitted that there is evidence of improvement in Negro voting rights, but the number of voters should be higher. More than 4,000,000 Negroes should be voting in the South, in spite of the inadequacies of voting lists in several counties, a condition which makes a true appraisal possible.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of numerous and incredible restrictions, continued McGill, Negro registration in eleven Southern states--Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia--had, in 1958, constituted only about 25 per cent of the Negroes of voting age in those states.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 234-235, 262.

<sup>2</sup>New York Times Magazine, June 21, 1959, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

Although, in 1948, he opposed President Truman's proposed civil rights legislation, part of which contained voting rights provisions, McGill generally favored, and even recommended federal legislation against the denial of voting rights. He had opposed the legislation on the basis of the coercive power implied therein; the lack of public moral support from the "substantial South;" and the lack of methods of implementation. Similar laws were already existing, but divorced from the ballot, they, like the proposed legislation, would not be "worth the paper it was written on." He pointed out that the proposed law would not change existing state law. Moving the jury from the county courthouse to a jury box in the Federal building would not change its state of mind.<sup>1</sup>

In 1949, as Congress debated civil rights legislation, he recommended that the "full weight, advice, and assistance of the Justice Department be thrown into the measure in order to facilitate rapid litigation against the camouflaged imitations of the white primary, which were keeping the Negro divorced from the ballot, thereby, impeding the fight for civil rights. He considered Congressional legislative processes in this area too "slow and tedious."<sup>2</sup>

By 1957, however, McGill had experienced a decided

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, March 1, 1948, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Atlantic Monthly, November, 1949, pp. 64-66.

change in attitude toward the need for strong federal legislation in the field of voting rights. He supported the Civil Rights Act of 1957 by urging "thoughtful" and "patriotic" Southerners to accept the responsibility of eliminating the inequities in voting rights. The failure of the states to do so on their own initiative had necessitated the legislation. In somber tones, McGill declared, that it was "no longer possible to oppose the rights of eligible citizens freely to cast a ballot." He also warned that the voter qualifications, if they were included in the proposed legislation, would have to be free of discrimination, and their administration would have to be just. Violators of the law would not be protected by a jury trial. Issuing a sharp warning, McGill stated that if Southern senators were to be effective in this period of transition, the South would have to be just. "It is no longer possible to condone or overlook withholding the ballot."<sup>1</sup>

Further evidence of McGill's changing attitude toward coercive legislation to ensure voting rights was his criticism of the Civil Rights Act of 1960. He labeled it a "watered-down compromise" that would be ineffective in the areas that needed such a law most, because of the fact that it lacked power of implementation. Negroes in rural areas of the Deep South, where they for so long have been

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, August 12, 1951, p. 1.

disfranchised, could expect nothing from the bill. It has been so completely stripped of much of its expediency, McGill believed, that implementation of the bill would be impossible in such areas. The political climate in areas where the law was needed most presented a task far greater than the adequacy of the new law.<sup>1</sup>

McGill alluded to the innumerable problems that the aspiring Negro voters would face under the new law. Anyone found qualified by a federal judge and given a certificate still had to face the same men who had denied him before. Retaliation would soon be felt in the form of economic, physical, and psychological pressures. Those making the law had either overlooked one outstanding fact, or had relegated it to a position of unimportance. The fact is this: Negro efforts at citizenship were being inhibited by official discrimination, or by officially-sanctioned illegal inhibitors. The law would be effective only where it was possible to detect open official discrimination, but where fear of economic or physical reprisal was rampant, the law was useless. All the excruciating consequences experienced by the Negroes who had the courage to attempt to register served to dramatize the weaknesses of the law. The law meant little in a situation comprised of a one-crop economy, the dependent status of the Negro, and white officials determined to

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph McGill, "New Law, Old Fears," The Reporter, June 9, 1960, pp. 31-34.

maintain and perpetuate the status quo. It was clear that political freedom of the Negro was not an abstract and independent factor, but a deeply rooted part of a complex whole. The harsh realities of the political climate in the Deep South would hardly be scratched by the bill.<sup>1</sup>

Opposition to Negro voting rights is still rampant today. McGill declared that politics in the South today is still shamefully dictated by extremists, diehards, and White Citizens Councils. The Dixiecrats of the Deep South, he asserted, grew out of efforts by the Deep South leaders to resist the demand for an honest civil rights plank in the 1948 Democratic Party platform. McGill labeled the Dixiecrat Party "the most infamously hypocritical and intellectually dishonest political organization ever created." The real principles of the party, he continued, were the same as those later espoused and practiced by the worst of the White Citizens Councils. Moreover, he intimated that many of the Dixiecrats were the chief organizers and supporters of those councils; that since the White Citizens Councils still, to a large extent, dictated Southern politics, they still opposed voting rights and defended unjustices and inequities of citizenship "as being a part of those things we hold most dear."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 187, 110.

Many Southerners still think local self-government means freedom to practice discrimination unmolested, or to maintain a static realm in a fast-changing world. Therefore, the cliché of local self-government is an inevitable feature of Southern reaction to the merest suggestion of granting the right of suffrage to Negroes. In 1962, the Alabama State Democratic Committee condemned the United States Attorney General, charging interference with the "historic rights of white Southern Democrats." The angry assertion was "that Southerners have special rights not shared by other Americans," a myth held by a surprisingly large number of Southerners.<sup>1</sup>

The South also considered the denial of suffrage to Negroes a special right to be exercised at will. The lack of morality, sensitiveness of conscience, and the lack of an inclination to abandon outdated practices,<sup>2</sup> led them to seek, to justify their actions with intellectually dishonest rationalizations. Some were in the form of exploitation of the fear of political domination by the Negro.<sup>3</sup> Others proposed that the Negro show some capacity for civic responsibility before being given the ballot. Such reasoning, believed McGill, was illogical and ironical in view of the long

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, February 7, 1962, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 230-240.

<sup>3</sup>McGill, New York Times Magazine, June 21, 1959, p. 22.

record of deprivations which had resulted in political illiteracy and immaturity for many Negroes.<sup>1</sup> Answering the charge the Negro vote was "venal," and easy prey to unscrupulous politicians, who delivered it in blocs, McGill pointed out that wherever the Negro had been allowed to vote, the pattern of his vote was similar to that of any other group seeking community services.<sup>2</sup>

He pointed out, however, that all the arguments above were irrelevant to the right of Negroes to vote.<sup>3</sup> Yet, at state and local levels, a stubborn and angry resistance to granting what was the most fundamental civil right--that of casting a ballot for those who will govern still exists.<sup>4</sup>

The long-range side effects of the denial of suffrage were quite evident in the general political apathy among Negroes--a condition resulting from generations of "too little educational and even less opportunity to acquire and exhibit political conscientiousness." Further, the open denial of the ballot to Negro by state and local officials created a political climate that was a potent factor in the motivation of ruthless violence and intimidation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph McGill, "The South Will Change," Saturday Evening Post, September 30, 1961, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Henry L. Moon, Balance of Power: The Negro Vote (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1948), pp. 40-46.

<sup>3</sup>Atlanta Constitution, April 7, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>The Reporter, June 9, 1960, pp. 31-34.

<sup>5</sup>New York Times Magazine, June 21, 1959, p. 5.

McGill predicted a bright future in the area of Negro voting rights. It had long been his opinion that despite the overwhelming restrictions, the Negro had for some time been in a strong position to demand more of the benefits of citizenship. Competition for his vote might become an "open sesame" for rights in the South. This possibility had already become evident at national, state, and local levels. He held that "one of the best features of the Negro minority" that was at that time seeking the ballot, was the goal set by its leadership--that of full citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

McGill predicted that "this decade--1960-1970--will become known to historians of the future as that in which the nation went through the pains of providing all its minorities with full citizenship rights - to which they have been entitled all along."<sup>2</sup>

The end has not yet arrived, but it is fast approaching. It was McGill's belief that the real revolution would occur in the field of voting rights, and that advancement in that area would quickly benefit all other aspects of life.<sup>3</sup> He held that "the momentum of change which is in motion all around the world will be hastened in our country by those newly coming to the ballot."<sup>4</sup> He had hoped that the Southern

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, May 26, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>McGill, "The South Looks Ahead," Ebony, September, 1963, p. 102.

<sup>4</sup>Atlanta Constitution, April 3, 1963, p. 1.



power structures would have visualized the "inevitable conclusions of the tragedy in which they are all playing roles, visible or invisible." Summing up what he believed to be the logical attitude toward Negro voting rights, the editor wrote:

Surely, by now, it must be plain to every thoughtful citizen that it is the responsibility of accountable men and women everywhere to establish the clearly established legitimate aims of the Negro population--aims which give no public rights not already held by other citizens --with as little damage to the respective communities and the nation as possible. We all know that only about a third of the qualified Negro voters have been permitted to vote; that about 10 years after the school decision there are states and communities which still make much of defiance; that there have been, and are, inequities in education and opportunity.

Surely we have the honor and the courage to do what is right.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., July 19, 1963, p. 1.

### Chapter III

#### McGill's Attitude Toward the Economic Status of Negroes

Advancement in the field of civil rights for Negroes was closely related to their economic status. Economic dependence on the white man has proven to be a great deterring factor to the attainment of full citizenship rights by Negroes. The Southern white man had definite ideas about the position of the Negro in the economic sphere of the South. It was a general and traditional custom of the white man to restrict and exploit the Negro, and "keep him in his place"--the place relegated to him by the majority group.<sup>1</sup> The white man equated social status with different kinds of jobs; consequently, certain jobs were unequivocally denied to Negroes. No matter what his capabilities were, the Negro usually found that it was futile to apply in certain fields of work. The economic bond of restriction made him the victim of all the iniquities of a dual economic system.<sup>2</sup> Thus he was caught in a vicious circle of low income, low living standards, poor education, poor citizenship, low

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<sup>1</sup>Rose, op.cit., p. 64.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 217.

voting interests and performance, and consequently, to the lowest jobs again.<sup>1</sup>

This dual system resulted from the common practice of placing status on jobs by separating the economy into compartments--one labeled "Negro jobs," the other "white jobs," and by the traditionally lower wage for Negro jobs. The pattern was very effective in retarding the economic progress of the Negro, for it was sufficiently rigid to place the Negro worker "at the bottom of the economic ladder and to herd him into the least desirable slum on near-slum living quarters."<sup>2</sup>

The widespread and popular theory in the South that the Negro must be kept in his place, was sustained by discrimination in justice, politics, education, and public service. This practice created a climate in which economic suppression became natural and necessary to prevent social equality.<sup>3</sup> The Negro, having been denied political and educational opportunities on an equal basis with other Americans, finds himself at the bottom of the economic strata. This low economic status is further complicated by the bi-racial system wherein the educational, cultural, and social facilities available are determined by the economic level

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas J. Woofter, Southern Race Progress (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1957), pp. 158-159.

<sup>3</sup>Rose, op.cit., p. 64.

of the majority of the Negro population.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, the color line in the nation's economy constitutes a major deterrent to full citizenship for the Negro. The nation has been slow in assuming its responsibility of adopting a policy to equalize job opportunities. The Report of the United States Commission on Civil Rights, 1961, stated that Federal policy of equal opportunity has not been made consistent or thoroughly effective.<sup>2</sup> "The first congressional enunciation of the principle of equal job opportunity appeared in the Unemployment Act of 1933." Others followed, all contained nondiscriminatory provisions, but the record shows that in direct contravention to the policy expressed by Congress, Negroes were denied equality of economic opportunity. The abrogating of the various expressed congressional policies could be seen by the inability of the Negro to participate in federally financed programs. The termination of the FEPC in 1946, practically ended co-ordinated efforts by the federal government to effectuate a policy of equal employment opportunity until March 1961, when President Kennedy issued Executive Order 10925. Before then, "only piecemeal efforts were made to eliminate discrimination in employment by the Federal Civil Service, the Armed

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<sup>1</sup>Charles S. Johnson, Growing Up in the Black Belt (Washington: American Council on Education, 1941), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup>U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, Report: Employment Vol. III (Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1961), p. 157.

Services, government contractors, and grant-in-aid recipients."<sup>1</sup>

Recently, discussing discrimination in job opportunities, Mr. McGill wrote that discrimination in "job opportunity is wrong and expensive in dollars and human lives."<sup>2</sup> "The South cannot close its economic gap unless it raises the potential of all its people."<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly enough, McGill has not always taken such a decided stand against the classification or distribution of jobs on the basis of race or color. At one time he apparently accepted and supported, to a certain degree, discriminatory practices in job opportunity. Indicative of the case in point were statements made by McGill relative to the dualism of job distribution. As early as 1942, one statement was made in reference to a campaign promise made by Governor Eugene Talmadge. Talmadge had promised the voters that as long as he was governor, "no Negro will serve as foreman in a cotton mill over white employees." With obvious contempt, the editor wrote: "...certainly not. That wouldn't happen no matter who was governor." Further commenting on the statement, McGill accused Talmadge of trying to raise an issue over the possibility of economic competition by Negroes in order to make his audience believe

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-12.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, May 9, 1962, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., September 27, 1963, p. 1.

that such a thing had been proposed. According to the editor, no such proposal had been made and Governor Talmadge was aware of that. The Georgia Constitution forbade it and had done so since 1870. That could only be changed by the legislature and a referendum, said McGill.<sup>1</sup> The commentary suggests that he accepted the general practice of barring Negroes from any job that might have been considered as giving them status above white employees. He did not question the practice of economic proscription, but did question the use of the issue as a campaign strategy. Despite the fact that he took no positive stand for such practices, his failure to offer open opposition to economic proscription could possibly have given comfort to those rigidly upholding the law. He might have felt it impolitic at that point to make the more liberal comment.

Another statement, also a reaction to one of Talmadge's campaign promises, revealed that McGill was not opposed to segregated employment. The comment was that there were many "good Christian men and women in Georgia who believed that the races could remain separated" and have "equal opportunity to use one's skills without having to mix with other workers...."<sup>2</sup> Here, again, was the indication that he supported the separation of the races as an accepted way of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., August 3, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., June 12, 1946, p. 6.

life.

The civil rights program proposed by President Truman in 1948, created much controversy and loud protests. One phase of the bill, that providing for the establishment of a Fair Employment Practices Commission, received the most severe criticism. The bill also included provisions for a compulsory law and empowered a commission to issue and enforce, cease and desist orders. Opponents of the bill argued that the provisions were encroachments on the right of private employers - their right of freedom of contract.<sup>1</sup>

The most vigorous protest to the FEPC Bill emanated from the South, which attacked the measure with self-righteous indignation. The Southerners in Congress saw the bill, not as an attempt to provide equal opportunity for all to earn their livelihood at their top skills, but as a "malign interference with Southern customs."<sup>2</sup>

McGill was highly critical of the program. He opposed the establishment of a permanent FEPC. It was reported that when President Truman's civil rights program was being debated in Congress in 1948, McGill, in a direct manner, denounced the FEPC measure as "unconstitutional and a violation of employers civil rights."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Kelly and Harbison, op.cit., pp. 31-36.

<sup>2</sup>George B. de Huszar, Equality in America (New York: The N. W. Wilson Company, 1949), p. 183.

<sup>3</sup>Atlanta Daily World, February 28, 1948, p. 1.

In his column of February 9, 1948, McGill, with his familiar two-fisted editorial approach, spoke out sharply against a federal Fair Employment Practices Act. After summing up what he called the "malicious results inherent in the bill," the outspoken editor issued the following warning: "We Southerners who have lived with the problem [race] from birth will not submit to revolutionary legislation by President Truman, the Republicans, Henry Wallace or anyone else."<sup>1</sup> In a direct manner he denounced the measure as "unconstitutional, coercive, impossible to enforce, and an attempt by Congress to legislate in the field of morality." He was not opposing anything that would better a man's position, but with intellectual honesty, he had refused to view the proposed legislation as "the" solution to the problem of race and jobs. Moreover, he felt the measure to be unconstitutional and a violation of an employer's rights.<sup>2</sup>

McGill had opposed the timing and methods behind the proposed legislation. He held "that an FEPC of force" was of doubtful constitutionality and impossible to enforce. Despite the fact that he had urged that Negro workers with skills be given a chance to work, he could not support attempts to legislate in the field of morality. It was his

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted in Louis T. Griffith and John E. Talmadge, Georgia Journalism 1763-1950 (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1951), p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, February 29, 1948, p. D-2.



contention that the solution to the problem was not to be found in federal legislation, but in voluntary action by the Southern states through a sense of moral responsibility. He argued that it was necessary to "stop somewhere," or soon federal laws would replace all local law. Furthermore, there were already similaw laws existing, and they like the proposed law, would not be "worth the paper on which they are written" without the ballot and support of public morality.<sup>1</sup>

In 1949, Mr. McGill was still maintaining his uncompromising stand on the issue. He reiterated his belief that such a law never worked and, that while the majority of Southern Negroes wanted an FEPC, they preferred "one of investigation, arbitration, conciliation, and one without coercive police powers." Some of the opposition stemmed from distortion of the bill. "At the crossroads" it seemed a threat of social equality, forced social mixing, and a prelude to compulsory intermarriage. The coercive powers of the bill had made it impossible to discuss it in a climate of reason. The more substantial Southerner and McGill saw it as a program too burdensome to execute, and as an attempt "to legislate in the field of morals and social doctrine."<sup>2</sup> He believed that the problem could best be worked out through interracial cooperation, "but jobs by fiat in a region historically

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., March 1, 1948, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>Atlantic Monthly, November 11, 1949, pp. 64-66.

short of jobs would not work out."<sup>1</sup> Thus McGill, possessing great power to influence the direction of public opinion had flatly denounced what many Negroes felt was their first real break-through to economic rights.

McGill's attitude toward the FEPC in 1950 was quite a contrast to his previous one. Commenting on the bipartisan debates in Congress on the FEPC, McGill stated that such a split was deplorable because the basic objective of the bill was sound. The principle of the bill that McGill embraced was that "a person's race or religion should not prevent him from obtaining and holding a job for which he or she may be qualified." Hardly anyone, he asserted, would be willing to oppose that sort of ideal. That the Negro has met discrimination in employment, said McGill, could not be denied by any honest man. No honest man could condone it.<sup>2</sup>

In 1954 commenting on the role the Negro in the economic development of the South, McGill wrote that more and more Southerners were beginning to realize that not only had the Negro been too often deprived of some fundamental rights and denied economic opportunity, but also "that such a policy has been morally wrong and economically costly." Continuing, McGill stated that those who possessed a sense of justice and fair play would view the problem, not only in "terms of farm or industrial labor, but also in terms of

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, May 7, 1950, p. A-22.

what intelligence and ability...could contribute if allowed to develop and to be employed where they are most needed."<sup>1</sup>

The more recent expressions by McGill revealed a more favorable attitude toward the economic problems of the Negro. It appeared that he had hopes that the South would recognize its problem, and move in a positive manner to solve it. Experiences of the 1930's and the Second World War also seemed to make McGill a little less patient with his native Southland. He pointed out that even after the end of World War II, highly skilled Negroes found it impossible to use their skills to make a living. Segregation barred them from "all but the meager employment search." These were "tangible symbols," that illustrated "the enormous injustices segregation had imposed."<sup>2</sup>

He criticized southern leaders for failure to seek logical solutions to its economic problems. It was obvious to the interested Southerner that, because of fear of the criticism for going too far, "the South has gone too slow in this field." Mr. McGill urged a sense of justice and fair play in solving the problem. He wrote:

Jobs are not social past-times.... The South must lift itself to the higher income level by integrating the Negro population into its economy and by doing in industry what has been done in schools--paying equal

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph McGill, The Fleas Come With the Dog, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 120.

<sup>2</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 214, 215, 218.

wages for equal work.<sup>1</sup>

Many people, he continued, blindly equate the giving of jobs "as establishing social equality--or somehow as offending Southern customs." It is true that "we have made much progress," but "common sense, common decency, and common justice, as well as plain unselfishness, indicate" that "we can speed up the economic progress."<sup>2</sup>

It was absurd of Southerners to assume that they could "still go on thinking in terms of the old concepts and formulae." With the great influx of people into cities and the resulting influence of group thinking and psychology and widespread unemployment, it was rather obvious that some new formulae, great moral courage and force, and a true sense of values are needed.<sup>3</sup>

In a commencement address at Morehouse College in 1962, McGill noted the lack of economic opportunities open to Negroes. In the South, he said, the door of opportunity still was not open for the "educated, competent Negro graduate." Many students had received awards offering attractive jobs or scholarships to places out of the South. This was no coincidence, he implied, that most of them offering technical skills were largely out of the South. It was painfully

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, July 14, 1951, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>McGill, The Fleas Come With the Dog, p. 7.

true that the door was cracked, he said, but not open. "We waste too much competence," he said. "It is not a surplus commodity." Competency still meant little in terms of economic rewards in few areas save segregated teaching.<sup>1</sup>

McGill deplored the migration of Negroes to other areas. Many go, lacking education and training, and find themselves in big city slums, struggling at marginal jobs, or picking up what work they can find in unskilled capacities. An illiterate "boy or girl from Alabama or Georgia can quickly become a hoodlum" or a social-welfare statistic in some big city--victims of inequitable education and opportunities.<sup>2</sup>

Recently McGill described the economic turmoil of the South as one filled with agony and violence. "Those who have watched the South's struggle to do what morally and legally was long overdue," said McGill, "have been fascinated, repelled and inspired by the tortured duel between morality and materialisms." The door to economic opportunity, intimated McGill, is being pried open by muted cash registers, because morality has been ineffective in the transition of Southern and national life. It was deplorable, he asserted, "that the sound of muted cash registers

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<sup>1</sup>Ralph McGill, Saturday Evening Post, September 30, 1961, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

have been more powerful than morality." He held that economic fears run deep in communities where the whites' only feeling of superiority or advantage is the color of his skin. The door will be open, but not without bitterness, violence and hate.<sup>1</sup>

Commenting on the contemporary economic status of the Negro McGill reminded his readers that on a national scale unemployment was "becoming largely Negro. They are the last to be hired, the first to be laid off." Negroes were slowly dominating the armed forces too; because "in uniform, one may have a job, be trained in a trade, including electronics, engines, the magic computers, radio, television--skills not always available outside the Army."<sup>2</sup> What matters now in the area of economics is that 185 million Americans "commit themselves to an honest approach of allowing 18 million Americans to share opportunity and life."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, January 19, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., July 13, 1963, p. 1.

## Chapter IV

### McGill's Attitude on the Social-Educational Status of the Negro

Historians tell us, said McGill, that "much of our natural history has been a process of integrating minority groups into our life stream." This accomplishment "insofar as most of the great in-migrations are concerned," has progressed normally. Most of these "came relatively late-- the Italians, Jews, Irish, and in lesser numbers, Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Germans, et al." The "problem of one of the oldest Americans, the Negro, and of citizens of Mexican, Oriental and Indian descent," was for a long time ignored in regard to integration. Only with the advent of the Second World War, and the discussions and pledges of freedom and dignity of man that grew out of it, did we really begin to face this problem.<sup>1</sup>

Surely, by now, it must be plain to every thoughtful citizen that it is the responsibility of accountable men and women everywhere to establish the clearly established legitimate aims of the Negro population....<sup>2</sup>

Thus did McGill define the legal and moral task of

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, May 9, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., July 7, 1964, p. 1.

the nation toward forming a new national consensus in relation to its commitment to granting full citizenship rights to Negroes.

The Negro has long occupied the lowest position of social stratification in American society. He was relegated to such a position and held there by an officially enforced system of segregation, the worst form of which was limited largely to the South.<sup>1</sup>

The separate but equal policy of the southern states conceded that the Negro is entitled to the same privileges as the whites but on a rigidly segregated basis. The contradictory and complex theory recognized Negroes as "citizens and intelligent beings entitled to enjoy the status accorded to the individual in our American heritage of freedom." In contradiction, the theory also branded the Negro "with a mark of inferiority and asserted that he was not fit to associate with white people."<sup>2</sup>

The settled policy of separation by compulsion is allegedly based on the belief that Negroes are mentally inferior to whites and should be segregated and subordinated.<sup>3</sup> James M. Dabbs, perceptive author and native Southerner,

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<sup>1</sup>The President's Committee on Civil Rights, Report: To Secure These Rights (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1947), p. 79.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Nathaniel Weyl, The Negro in American Civilization. (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1960), p. 20.



described this policy as an institution to make the Negro realize that he was a Negro and belonged to an inferior caste. The rationalizations, however, were that separation was essential to maintain and protect the integrity, as well as the moral, educational and cultural standards of the white race.<sup>1</sup>

Assuming that the Negro was inferior, the white man became obsessed with the myth of white supremacy and the determination to maintain this ideal by separating the races. He constructed laws restricting Negroes in the entire course of their daily lives. The system of deprivation was forced upon the Negro; and legal, social, or economic sanctions were applied by the dominant group to enforce conformity. Such restrictions within themselves created inequality by imposing a caste status upon the Negro, who had to adjust his behavior in response to organized white demands.<sup>2</sup> This unifying principle of southern history has been defined as a "common resolver indomitably maintained" by the white man that the South belonged and would always belong to the white man. "The consciousness of a function in these premises whether expressed with the frenzy of a demagogue or maintained with the repose of a patrician, is the cardinal test of a

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<sup>1</sup>James M. Dabbs, op.cit., pp. 61-86.

<sup>2</sup>Arnold Rose, op.cit., pp. 189-190.

Southerner and the central theme of southern history."<sup>1</sup>

Segregation and discrimination are national practices, but in the South where these principles were written into the laws and constitutions, and deeply embedded in the social mores of the Deep South States, it is harsher and practiced with less subtlety. The majority of post-Civil War Southerners were in accord on one fundamental fact. Before the South could be rehabilitated, the Negro must be adjusted to his status, and his place in the political and economic life of the region had to be determined. The constitutional conventions apportioned representation in legislatures on the basis of white population alone, not one gave the former slaves the ballot; and most enacted the infamous Black Codes.<sup>2</sup> The "Negro must be made aware, by every possible device, of his racial inferiority and of the subservience which that inferiority ordained."<sup>3</sup> Such state-sanctioned caste was upheld by the United States Supreme Court in the case of Plessy V. Ferguson (1896), establishing the "separate but equal rule." The ruling involved travel, but its implications were soon extended to other areas, spreading to voting in 1898 and to education in 1899. By validating legislation which, by

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Grier Sellers, Jr., The Southerner As an American, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1960), p. 104.

<sup>2</sup>Carter, The Angry Scar, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 372-375.

implication, recognized the Negro as a special caste, the court legitimatized and accepted the Jim Crow doctrine of "separate but equal."<sup>1</sup>

Within the caste system of segregation, in addition to the denial of suffrage and economic rights, the Negro has also been continually denied other rights such as access to education and all public aspects of American life.<sup>2</sup>

Changing attitudes towards Negro aspirations as expressed in the opening passages of this chapter are indicative of the expressions now made by McGill daily as he works for the advancement of human rights. Although he was not considered to be a segregationist, there is evidence that McGill had at one time, accepted and supported the Southern pattern of segregation.

Indicative of this support was an editorial written in 1946, in which McGill stated that "thousands of good Christian men and women in Georgia" believed that the races should be separated. They also believed, he continued, that it was possible to have "separation and equal justice before the law," that there could be equal opportunities to use one's skills and still not have to mix with other workers; equal opportunity for education without mixing in schools."<sup>3</sup>

In an editorial, June 19, 1948, McGill sought to allay

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<sup>1</sup>Kelly and Harbison, op.cit., pp. 492-495.

<sup>2</sup>Carter, The Angry Scar, pp. 379-386.

<sup>3</sup>Atlanta Constitution, December 19, 1961, p. 1.

the fears of many Southerners to discuss the Negro problem publicly. "The chief problems of the South," he said, were "education, public health, and the Negro." As a result of this, public and honest discussion was needed. Yet, many good Southerners, afraid to discuss the Negro, had left the issue "to be discussed in terms of ignorance, prejudice," and Klan ideas. The lack of public forum was due to the fear of being accused of "mixing or mongrelizing the races." The fear was unnecessary, he continued, and kept "us from being honest with ourselves." "Certainly the South isn't going to abandon its pattern of segregation. It wouldn't be possible even if desirable." However, continued McGill, the pattern of segregation must be made into "a more balanced one." He contended that the South "ought to be glad and eager" to do that. He proposed certain changes in the treatment of the Negro within the existing social framework; changes necessary for the survival and maintenance of the pattern of segregation. His proposals included the consolidation of and the improvement of Negro schools, and better buses for Negro children. That, in his opinion, was a start that could be made that would not "smack of social equality or mixing of the races." He pointed out that "all our towns" welcomed Negro dollars, but "few provided restrooms and recreational facilities for Negroes" who came to town on Saturday to shop. This would not "violate the code of the most violent anti-Negro feelings."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., June 19, 1948, p. 4.

It seems clear that he concurred with and accepted segregation.

Other indications that McGill accepted the doctrine of segregation was revealed by him in comments on the campaign techniques often used by Governor Eugene Talmadge. In effect, Governor Talmadge had said that as long as he was governor, no white and Negro children would go to school together. "Certainly not," wrote McGill. "The state constitution has forbidden it since 1870. It would not happen no matter who was governor unless the constitution was changed."<sup>1</sup> At another time, McGill, repudiating a charge made by Talmadge that outside influences were trying to run the University of Georgia, accused Governor Talmadge of being willing to ruin the state university just to stir up a false issue. In caustic tones, McGill stated that it was "fantastic to think that anyone would, in Georgia or any other Southern State, attempt to have racial coeducation." He declared that neither the Negro nor the white people wanted such a thing. He also asserted that Negro teachers wanted separated schools maintained just as strongly as did those of the white races.<sup>2</sup> McGill, making another plea for equalization, attacked the "shacks" which he said were characteristic of the majority of the Negro schools in Georgia. He urged Southern whites to think honestly about the status of the Negro and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., August 3, 1942, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., August 9, 1942, p. 4.

make an honest attempt to provide for greater equality in education. He pointed out that the pattern of separate schools was under attack and that it could be defended only if "we honestly meet its problems."<sup>1</sup> McGill attacked the Atlanta school board for not providing sufficient space, facilities and qualified teachers in certain Negro schools. The conditions resulting from such inadequacy, asserted McGill, would be "productive of violence, disorder and shame...."<sup>2</sup> These expressions indicate that he was opposed, not to segregation, but to the manner in which it was practiced.

Inequities in the "separate but equal" system nagged the conscience of McGill. His apparent annoyance at the callousness of Southerners in race relations, prompted him to make almost constant appeals for equality. He continued to attack the inequities in the dual educational system, warning that the South would have to make good its own laws requiring separate but "equal" school facilities.<sup>3</sup>

The last few decades saw many changes in the world, in the nation, and in the people themselves, but many inequities still persisted. Being cognizant of the continuing process of revolutionary forces and the stubborn

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., June 19, 1948, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., June 3, 1948, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., April 17, 1949, p. B-14.

resistance of many Southerners to the idea of granting the Negro even the most basic of human rights, McGill apparently developed a new perspective on the general problem of race.<sup>1</sup>

As late as the early 1950's, when it seemed that the separate but equal doctrine would finally be invalidated, many of the Southern states made little effort to equalize education. Instead, there was frantic search for ways to retain segregated schools.<sup>2</sup>

On April 9, 1953, McGill predicted that the United States Supreme Court would soon hand down a ruling that would "outlaw the South's dual school system, wholly or in part." Although many thought it unlikely, he was almost certain that it would come. He urged the South to face reality; to open its eyes to the inequities, instead of putting the subject of education aside and keeping it quiet because of its emotional content. This, said McGill, was an old familiar reaction, best illustrated by Scarlett O'Hara, in Gone With the Wind. Whenever Miss O'Hara faced a distasteful decision, she pushed it aside with the remark, "'We'll talk about that tomorrow.'" "The average citizen," said McGill, who was not aware of the probability, was in for a surprise, because "tomorrow" has an ugly "habit of coming around." Continuing in a moderately conservative tone, he intimated that the white public should be told in

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 30-31.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

a calm and informative manner while they were still able to listen. He cited cases already in the Court, all of which he said were based on violations of the Fourteenth Amendment.<sup>1</sup> The new complaints before the Court at that time were based on the contention that separation in itself constituted a condition of inequality and did in fact, "abridge the privileges of colored people." Having listed several possible decisions of the Court, he predicted that the Court would probably rule segregation unconstitutional and allow time for the states to comply. McGill urged the states to work out methods of compliance rather than to seek ways to evade the law. Whatever the decision of the Court, he counseled, there should be no violence. Leadership should make this clear.<sup>2</sup>

The decision in the case of Brown v. Board of Education was expected by many. With the Gaines precedent of 1938 serving as a basis for further litigation, the breach in the wall of segregation had been systematically widened.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, the average Southerner was stupefied by the decision. The impact of the decision brought about varied reaction, from the states. Some moved to comply; others vehemently and openly refused to initiate any program

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, April 9, 1953, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Harry S. Ashmore, The Negro and the Schools (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1954), p. 33.



of integration. They even passed laws designed to nullify the Court's decision.<sup>1</sup> This dilemma, believed McGill, was due to the failure of leaders, politicians especially, to inform their people of the true situation that existed. Extremists and leadership, in and out of high places, had led the public to believe that the states could reverse the court order and avoid the processes of the law.<sup>2</sup>

The furious protest, the slander on the unanimous court, and the surprise evoked by the 1954 decision was an indication of "how deeply convinced many persons were that the Negro was not a citizen and even if he were, he shouldn't be," said McGill.<sup>3</sup> The leaders presented arguments to the effect that the Negro children would lower the level of classroom performance. They were not ready for desegregation. Such rationalizations were ironic, because it was an indictment on the whole system of segregated education. It also was an attempt "against what is, after all, a necessary and decent thing."

The 1954 decision, asserted McGill, made it obvious that "the old tradition of noblesse oblige," with its connotations of inferiority, was fading fast. He declared that the "United States could no longer ignore its own principles,

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<sup>1</sup>Virgil T. Blossom, It Has Happened Here (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1959), p. 196.

<sup>2</sup>McGill, A Church, A School (New York: Abingdon Press, 1959), pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, p. 188.

its Fourteenth Constitutional Amendment, and the demands of civilization and morality."<sup>1</sup>

McGill, like others, understood that the decision had a profound impact on the whole system of segregation. By its implications the decision had torn down the fortresses of those who interpreted the term "states rights" in such a way as to make it fit their own prejudiced purposes. The most ardent proponent of the status quo knew "that the Constitution of the United States could no longer be interpreted to mean one thing for one citizen and an opposite thing for another. At that time, "any political device that could make one man less a citizen than another, was not merely impotent, but was also regarded by most Americans as politically immoral." The decision for the first time, split the traditional solidarity of the South on racial issues. While many schools moved to desegregate or toward gradual compliance, others prepared for massive defiance and abolishment of their public school systems legislatively and emotionally.<sup>2</sup> About two years after the Court decision, McGill summed up its implication for the readers of the Atlantic Monthly:

In May, 1954, the Supreme Court blew down the already weakened walls of political feudalism in the South .... When the walls crumbled, the Humpty Dumpty of a convenient, oft-invoked regional concept of states' rights fell, too.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>McGill, "The Angry South," Atlantic Monthly, April, 1956, pp. 31-34.

Even if the apostles of this doctrine, which was as malleable as sculptors' clay in the hands of its many interpreters, were to put Humpty Dumpty back together again, there is no wall on which to set him. He fell with the walls, not from them.<sup>1</sup>

"The decisions was, all in one, fulcrum and lever," said McGill. "Customs, traditions, and political structures found themselves moved out of the way." The luckiest person in America, asserted McGill, was "the Southerner who was a part of this social revolution - of this determination to reaffirm the principles of what we have called the American dream."<sup>2</sup>

He had vigorously opposed the efforts by the states to evade the Court's decision, and also the open defiance of the law. In 1953, as the Supreme Court heard cases challenging the Plessy v. Ferguson doctrine, "there was something shameful in the hurry of the Southern states to equalize their schools," said McGill. They refused to admit what they knew to be inevitable. Their frantic efforts to invent schemes by which to carry on school segregation without legal compulsion was an admission that it was nearing its demise. Such a fact, he continued, had been evident for some time. In addition to secular forces at work against it, there was a great religious force. "Christianity" could not afford to be on the wrong side of the moral force.... Segregation implies inferiority." Changes would result from desegregation.

<sup>1</sup>Ibid.

<sup>2</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 188-189.

"The problem of the future is how to live with the change."<sup>1</sup>

The process of affecting change, in any existing system by legislation was one thing, and executing compliance with the change proved to be another. "The Supreme Court had provided elbowroom for reconciliation to its decision...." Two years after the decision, however, some Deep South states were still pursuing the course of noncompliance.<sup>2</sup>

Much of the defiant mind of the general Southern public, declared McGill, could be laid squarely in the laps of the leaders who led in the lawlessness and abuse of the Supreme Court. The public was led to believe that the Court had acted illegally...that the Constitution was not a part of law, and that the sovereign states "were not really bound by it." The public was told also, that the Court could not make laws, but was not told that the Court had interpreted an already existing law. "All the evasive legal delays and extremist defiance, much of it entirely cynical and self-serving," combined to create public confusion and misunderstanding. He thought it deplorable that men of free will had not been able or willing to do by themselves what the South and the nation were struggling to do by law. He also attacked the Southern bar association for their silence and failure to enlighten the public. "The greatest social

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, Time, December 14, 1953, p. 51

<sup>2</sup>Albert P. Blaustein and Clarence C. Ferguson, Jr., Desegregation and the Law (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1962), pp. 210-215.

reform of our time," continued McGill, "was, and is being implemented by Courts." Yet the Southern bar has remained silent, derelict in its duty to uphold the Court before the public. One of the saddest aspects of the whole Southern race problem, said he, was that of governors who had, by plan, had lawyers, paid out of public funds, join with them in public pronouncements which distorted and falsified facts and denied the primacy of the Constitution. The press and other media of communication, along with other community leaders, could have helped to bring about desegregation without mass violence, by offering truthful and honest leadership. The fact that others share in the guilt, continued McGill, does not "reduce journalism's accusing conscience."<sup>1</sup>

He noted that in the process of desegrating the schools, the states had been given time to adjust. The Court had also anticipated positive efforts and planning by skilled educators, school psychologists and social scientists who would assume direction of the processes of desegregation. Instead, in most cases, desegregation plans were made by political office holders and lawyers who knew nothing of setting up workable systems of classes. Each plan devised by such a group had as its main objective of preventing desegregation. Many of the skillfully designed plans were accepted by some federal district courts even though they did not offer equal

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 225-232.

protection of the law. Even then, Negroes were subjected to the same all discriminatory Southern practices. The legal wording of the placement criteria allowed white students with problems the same as those of Negroes to be admitted without question. Desegregated education had to be sought by Negroes, who faced many obstacles. Moreover, continued McGill, most of the plans worked backward. Most of the plans began with the twelfth grade where "the achievement gap was greatest due to cumulative years of discrimination in inferior Negro schools." Adjustments also was more difficult at the twelfth grade level, because "racial attitudes and images are more firmly established."<sup>1</sup>

McGill opposed the indiscriminate use of the term "tokenism." He did not consider small beginnings "unwise" or "in any sense token." Some schools, he explained, carefully screened pupils under the placement act. This was important to the pupils and to those who came after them; it was important that those children "would not fail." Unscreened admissions could have resulted in many failures. It was McGill's opinion, "that it was the better part of wisdom to select students for the precedent breaking changes who would be able to hold their own." In all cases in the Southern states where such a policy was used, the results had been good.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., 244-253.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 292-293.

McGill viewed with little enthusiasm, the many "quickie" private schools established following the 1954 Supreme Court decision. He held that children in the public schools were offered extensive participation in the great issues of the time. If the private school insulated the student against the facts of life and failed to prepare him for the unprotected life of today's world, then he would be better off in public school.<sup>1</sup>

One of the burdens of the South, McGill reminded his readers, had been the maintenance of two school systems when we hardly had "the money for one." The whole nation would prosper tremendously "if we would face up to the question and train and educate all Americans."<sup>2</sup> The South has generations, sacrificed education because of prejudice, and political ambitions. The melancholy phenomena of our times is that there are those who are still willing to "debase the quality of education in their states," create tension and violence "merely because a handful of decent, ambitious young colored students want an equal chance to learn."<sup>3</sup>

McGill, too, had at one time, accepted the "separate but equal" doctrine. It has been noted previously in this paper that he urged equalization of education and public facilities for Negroes, rather than integration in these

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, June 3, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., June 26, 1963, p. 7.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., May 31, 1963, p. 1.

areas. He, at one time, also had upheld segregated travel on public conveyance. In 1946, in the case of Morgan v. Commonwealth of Virginia, the Supreme Court invalidated a Virginia statute requiring Negro segregation on interstate buses passing through the state. The Court also held that the matter of segregation or nonsegregation interstate carriers was a national problem. Therefore, attempts by individual states to deal with such problems "were invalid obstructions of interstate."<sup>1</sup>

Editorializing in the Atlanta Constitution in June of that same year, McGill urged Georgians not to be alarmed over the invalidating of bus discrimination. He assured them that the law would be almost nullified in Georgia, because states adjoining Georgia had laws similar to those of Georgia, and that the new bus decision applied only to transportation that began in states having no laws requiring segregation. "It will not make a bit of difference" in the deep south where segregation is understood and necessary," said McGill. He further stated that in cases where it would occur only an "occasional person lacking common sense, will cause any trouble." Despite social reformers, continued McGill, most Negroes as well as whites would feel uncomfortable if forced to sit beside one another.<sup>2</sup>

On February 13, 1962, a federal district court ruled

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<sup>1</sup>Robert E. Cushman, Civil Liberties in the United States (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 217.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, June 12, 1946, p. 6.



that a Georgia law providing segregated bus facilities was unconstitutional.<sup>1</sup> Apparently McGill's attitude at this point had undergone considerable change during the intervening six years. He stated that since the Supreme Court had reaffirmed its ruling on segregation in public services, Southern state officials and some members of Congress chose to continue to mislead their constituents and to encourage those who seek to create anarchy. The distinguished Pulitzer Prize winner stated that it was "beyond belief that anyone intelligent enough to serve" in the Congress of his country could really believe that the Constitution would permit the states, the courts, local governments or public services to treat some citizens differently than others." Continuing he wrote:

The fact that for some years it was done does not at all alter the case. A citizen is a citizen, entitled to as much, but no more, than any other.

Yet, when the court ruled on a simple, uncomplicated fact--that all citizens must have the same treatment in public transportation, the response of a handful of Southern officials, local and national, were so irrelevant to the issue as to be both sad and humorous.<sup>2</sup>

McGill saw the sit-ins and other efforts to obtain full citizenship rights as a constitutional and legal way to register protest to injustices. The Plessy v. Ferguson decision, though it involved a rail transportation case, "was given immediate application in schools and all other

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<sup>1</sup>Current History, April 1962, p. 256.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, March 13, 1962, p. 1.

aspects of public life, "said McGill, except "of course, in the spending of hard-earned dimes and dollars for merchandise in retail stores." These "could be spent on an integrated basis." Nothing else was ever equal about the callously inferior and inadequate separateness. The formula was often a "neat legalism" that was frequently "so separate," said McGill, "as to be invisible and never to be found - such as in parks, high schools, hospitals or justice." The Court had never indicated that it had any sense of the responsibility to keep a judicial eye on the effect of the ruling, therefore, "there was never anywhere an effort to make the separateness equal," said McGill.<sup>1</sup>

McGill believed that the sit-ins had also proved to be an important effective force in the recent move for Negro rights. "They were," he said, "without question, productive of the most change." No argument in a court of law could have more vividly dramatized the immorality and the irrationality of the preposterous and morally wrong customs of inviting customers into a store to buy anything on sale, and then denying him the right to buy food or drink because he was a colored customer. No force brought changes or accomplished so much as quickly as had the sit-ins. They reached into remote areas and inspired adult men and women and relatives to give support to the young student sit-ins. "Not even the Supreme Court decision on the schools in 1954 had done

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 20-21.

this," declared McGill.<sup>1</sup> As the Freedom Riders and sit-ins spotlighted the injustices, "one fact became clear to all but the most hopelessly obtuse," said McGill. "The South could not win," "because it was again on the wrong side of another morally discredited peculiar institution." With the application of a Negro boycott of places where they were unwelcome, the trespass laws ceased to have meaning. What the laws had said to Negroes was: "'The trespass laws give me the right to insult you, but I expect you to trade with me anyhow.'" The merchants and operators of bus lines became outraged when the Negroes failed to patronize them. "In Mississippi Negroes were arrested for encouraging others to refuse to trade under such segregated conditions. It was McGill's opinion that "a public license is for public business."<sup>2</sup>

McGill deplored the fact that in many communities in the South, violent protest was not only supported by lawless mobs, but also by the police, mayors, and other state and local officials. Although the sit-ins, through the great moral strength of their actions, had earned respect and admiration the world over, some cities made them trespassers by passing hasty and ingenious municipal or state ordinances. Suddenly, new laws gave legal status to injustices and insults to human dignity. Therefore, mobs who exacted vicious

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., pp. 16-17.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, December 19, 1961, p. 1.

violence by brutally attacking men and women, could insist that "their 'demonstrations' were no more illegal than those of the peaceful sit-ins or bus riders."<sup>1</sup> At other times the police would be conveniently out of place. The Attorney General of the United States found it necessary to dispatch United States marshals to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1961, to cope with mass violence erupting over Freedom Riders in that city. The Attorney General reprimanded the police department for its failure to have enough men on hand to resist the mob. He also made it clear "that no community may support its own peculiar customs by attempts to main and kill other citizens."<sup>2</sup> "Must we have Little Rocks, Oxfords, Birmingham<sup>3</sup> in order to be persuaded to open public services to all citizens? Peoples of all ethnic groups have inherited a common country, have died for it, contributed to it, and worked for it."<sup>3</sup> Surely all can share the privileges.

As McGill attacked private businesses and corporations for the discrimination policies, either personally applied or sanctioned by those who controlled the businesses, the observer could detect a change in his attitude toward such matters as opposed to that expressed by him at a much earlier period.

He assailed corporations owning nationally located

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 17-18.

<sup>2</sup>McGill, Saturday Evening Post, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup>Atlanta Constitution, June 15, 1963, p. 1.

stores for not leading in the elimination of discrimination in their firms. He was reluctant to believe that their lawyers had persuaded them to "follow local customs in the South, while in other areas the same companies were told to practice no discrimination." McGill also asserted that a "national public philosophy, including the morality of our problem of race, held in common by American business," should have been adopted. McGill predicted that "American business would come to regret that its role in the drama of social change was more influenced by the slowing down of cash register bells than by morality."<sup>1</sup> The system of capitalism was developed by all the people of the country. With it was developed also a social conscience. "The dollar sign cannot afford to take a stand opposing human rights." It is not possible for "free enterprise to oppose, in human terms, what it insists on in competition."<sup>2</sup>

One often-used extremist tactic is to label anyone who promotes equal rights for Negroes a Red or Communist. Any attack on segregation was a Communist-inspired plot.<sup>3</sup> It is not a Communist plot, he cautioned his readers for Negro children to be admitted to schools, or for one citizen to wish to ride a bus in the same manner as any other citizen. It is more Communist-like to deny equal citizenship rights.

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, p. 229.

<sup>2</sup>Atlanta Constitution, November 29, 1962, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., July 19, 1963, p. 1.

The truth, said McGill, "is that segregation is no longer legal in public life. No private right has been, or will be, disturbed."<sup>1</sup>

McGill supported the Civil Rights Bill of 1964 which he called an "emancipation for the Southerner." No single act could do as much for the South as one that would "open the sector of public life to all citizens."<sup>2</sup> He severely criticized Southern senators who threatened to filibuster the bill. "It is no longer possible to deny 14 million American citizens the ordinary day-by-day right held 172 million." No one should wish to do so.<sup>3</sup> Ours is no longer a problem of direction, but of acceleration.<sup>4</sup>

He recognized that the white Southerner had a traditional habit of using one word or one Negro as the typical category by which to judge the whole race. He did not equate individual merit with Negroes. McGill summed up the theory in this manner:

One of the most important falsehoods and the most troublesome in our present time is the "stereotype," of the Negro into 'preacher,' 'Amos and Andy,' 'Uncle Tom,' 'Boy,' 'Uncle,' 'Mammy,' 'the teacher,' 'the illiterate from the farm and city slum,' etc. Most Southerners, do not know, or want to know the facts of the Negro development.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., July 19, 1963, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., May 4, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., February 5, 1964, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup>Hodding Carter, Southern Legacy (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1950), p. 178.

This one reason why the students in their sit-ins, and the pupils who have appeared at elementary, secondary schools and universities, have fitted none of the stereotypes.<sup>1</sup>

As noted above, McGill saw the demonstrations that accompanied the various drives for civil rights as being legitimate in most instances. Few were really endorsed by the Communists, "and the Negro, seeing this, drew back" from them. The Negro had been patient for generations, "but patience wears thin and is wiped out by vicious displays of law" as symbolized by Bull Connor, or the police chiefs in too many cities where people were clubbed for peaceful protests. There is one thing that "the nation must understand- the rebellion of the American Negro (after generations of patient expectancy) against ugly practices of discrimination cannot, and should not be suppressed." American public opinion would decry the use of "police violence to deny these Americans the substance of citizenship and dignity."<sup>2</sup>

McGill came to represent one of the strongest "humanitarian voices of the South." The voice has not always been so strong, nor the convictions so profoundly established. Earlier, especially during the early 1940's McGill had accepted and supported segregation in most phases of American life as a natural and desirable system. Whatever his reasons, he did uphold separation in jobs, schools, travel and public

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<sup>1</sup>Atlanta Constitution, January 26, 1961, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., June 23, 1963, p. 1.

facilities.

It should be noted that even during the time he supported separation of the races, McGill also fought courageously for equalization of the system. That was one of the inconsistencies of his earlier career. He exhibited an honest belief that his fellow Southerners would do what he considered at that time, to be morally and ethically right.

From time to time he sought to inform, steer, and persuade the South toward a more equitable course within the existing pattern of segregation. By the late forties and the early 1950's he had begun to see his native Southland in a slightly different light. Certain social forces at work in the world and nation were being largely ignored by the South, but he began to press for equalization.

The rapid succession of events following the 1954 school decision of the Supreme Court, convinced McGill that progress was incompatible with lawlessness, violence, and closed or crippled schools. "Day-by-day opposition to the Negro's rights to equal citizenship found itself more and more in the position of opposing the law and the Constitution."<sup>1</sup>

McGill held hope for the breakdown of old traditions and the emergence of equality for all citizens. Before the sit-ins, he asserted, the dust of legalism and political exploitation had hidden the issue of morality. But slowly the

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<sup>1</sup>Saturday Evening Post, September 30, 1961, p. 18.



South was beginning to light the lamp of ethical morality. The main source of solid progress still remained in Congress and the courts, but the "lighting of the lamp of ethical morality is long overdue."<sup>1</sup> He held that it is the duty of the Southern moderate to help strengthen the picture of the Negro as a citizen and to renew the necessary sense of inevitability in the Supreme Court decision and its appeal to the moral and reasonable man.<sup>2</sup>

McGill, in clear language, continued his plea for sanity, reason and morality. The problem of accepting the Negro as a human being is no longer a complex one. He stated that the "clamor of mongrelization of race, of supremacy, and of tradition has not ceased, but more and more it is known to be noise, not fact." Since much of the fantasy and self-deceit has been removed, the problem can be viewed with cleaner perspective, according to McGill. Thus its solution is relatively simple and easy. "It is," said McGill, "to grant to the Negro the rights and privileges of full citizenship." It is to look at the Negro and see another human being. We in the South, said McGill, are noted for our Bible-orientation, "but somehow along the way we managed to exclude the Negro from our concept of the Fatherhood

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<sup>1</sup>The Minneapolis Star, June 6, 1960, p. A-6.

<sup>2</sup>McGill, "The Southern Moderates are Still Here," New York Times Magazine, September 21, 1958, p. 13.

of God and the brotherhood of man."<sup>1</sup>

One promising aspect in the drive for equal rights was the fact that the Negro himself had come to realize the profound implications that a nation and world in transition had for him. The South needs him, said McGill, "as an educated, trained, participating citizen."<sup>2</sup> The Negro realized that he has a place in the nation and the challenge to secure that place is far greater than the forces that are determined to make him accept the old status of paternalism of the status quo. The challenge is also greater and stronger than the forces that seek to persuade him "to abandon his identity as an American."<sup>3</sup>

Looking into the future, McGill wrote:

All this means that attainment of civil rights is only a means to the more distant end--the long-term harvest of social, political, and economic reforms made possible by the possession use of those rights.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McGill, The South and the Southerner, pp. 232-237.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 232-233.

<sup>3</sup>Saturday Evening Post, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup>McGill, Ebony, p. 102.

## Summary

Ralph McGill is an outspoken and liberal promoter of human rights. He is considered as one whose courage and sense of moral responsibility have been the light of reason, printing the way to racial brotherhood.

Formerly, McGill was mildly conservative, in that he accepted and adhered to the general principles of the system of segregation. Despite his conservative views, even then, he earnestly worked to improve race relations within the framework of the southern system of segregation.

Revolutionary changes in the world made McGill wiser and more liberal in his stand on the issue of equal rights for Negroes. It is true that on certain issues he was conservative, or even silent. On others he was outspoken and courageous in his fight for Negro rights. Even when he accepted the doctrine of "separate but equal" facilities, he promoted the cause of the Negro.

On the issue of suffrage rights, he held that the granting of voting rights to Negroes was fundamental. This right he regarded as basic to all citizens. His support of Negro voting rights was evident in his promotion of legislation protecting those rights, and the time, space and tone of the editorials regarding Negro voting rights.

Though he formerly accepted the practice of economic proscription, McGill later became a staunch supporter for equal economic opportunities based on qualifications and competency. He encouraged the integration of the Negro into the economy of the South on the basis that it was good for both the South and the Negro. He considered the Negro to be an integral part of the society, with worthwhile contributions to make for the well-being of the community as a whole. He believed also, that the Negro was an important factor in the improvement and survival of the southern economy. He discouraged economic restrictions by pointing out the advantages of equal economic opportunities, and the disadvantages of forced migration of Negroes. He believed the restrictions were costly to the South in manpower and talent. The loss of talent and manpower by the forced migration of Negroes was an indication of the injustices inherent in job restrictions.

On the question of the social status of the Negro, McGill, was formerly vague and inconsistent. Usually he discussed subject response to some issue. Even then, he neither defended nor attacked the principle. However, it was evident that he opposed mixing of the races, thereby opposing social equality. Later editorial expressions by Mr. McGill revealed that his attitude on the issue of social equality was broader and more favorable toward the Negro. He came to view segregation in public matters as being morally wrong. He held, and still does hold, that

private association is a purely personal matter.

He formerly supported the "separate but equal" doctrine in educational areas of public life. Later he reversed his stand by pointing out that the system had never been equal; and, that it was too economically and intellectually expensive to try to maintain segregation. He held that this too was morally wrong.

Mr. McGill constantly and vigorously opposed the Ku Klux Klan, White Citizen Councils and other hate groups, which he said existed chiefly to intimidate, restrict, and harass the Negro. McGill believed that there was no place in today's world for such groups. They caused good people to lose their sense of decency and to become incapable of discerning the myth from the reality. Being a firm believer in government by law, he believed that such groups as mentioned above encouraged by white supremacy extremists, were detrimental to the South made it a demagogue.

He was shocked and caustically critical of Southern reaction to the 1954 Supreme Court decision. He attacked the massive resistance groups and pleaded for sanity and patience in facing new social conditions inherent in the decision. He took this stand in the heart of the Deep South where the battle was the hottest, and where some of the most unscrupulous extremists were encamped.

In recent years, McGill has become a vigorous crusader against racial intolerance. He believed that the nation's position as world leader was jeopardized by the failure of

the South to accept inevitable change and work for a just rational, and legal solution to its problem.

McGill held that it was folly to believe that segregation protected the integrity of the races. He held that the South had changed along with the rest of the world, and could no longer assume that it could still go on in terms of the old concepts and formulae. The problem of the future was how to live with the change.

McGill believed that public opinion was a vital and effective instrument in the fight for equal rights for Negroes. He held that the passage of laws to be administered by an extremist and demagogue public would be futile. He also held that laws must be accepted by the public in order to be effective. He contended that the problem of Negro rights was becoming more of a moral issue, and that it was impossible to legislate mores. Legislation he continued, could serve as guidance and support to the moral leaders. Consequently, he sought to influence public opinion favorably toward the Negro. In his editorial support of the Negro cause, he expounded and invigorated the liberal policies of the Constitution, and became a militant promoter of human rights, helping through the years to create a climate favorable to racial progress. He had the power to influence public opinion and he used it to lead the public in what he conceived to be the right direction.

As he hammered away at the evils against the Negro,

McGill set the pace in race relations in the South. His has come to represent one of the strongest humanitarian voices of the South.

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